satisfaction, or maybe this is boredom and restlessness, or nothing of any more significance than the recent appropriation of rap by white rapper Vanilla Ice or the appropriation of voguing, originally a Black gay dance, by Madonna. Vanilla Ice and Madonna ruthlessly continue the tradition of exploiting and stealing from Black culture. They are clearly descendants of Elvis Presley and other culture vultures that have gone skipping to the bank trading on their imitations and appropriations of Black culture for fame and fortune.

Voguing grew out of the gay balls. It is a very expressive dance of hands and limbs and attitude that is best exemplified by the gifted voguer Willi Ninja, Mother of the House of Ninja. The name for the dance is appropriated from *Vogue*, the infamous fashion bible, because the dance is a stylized imitation and exaggeration of fashion modeling. But from Madonna, the legendary "material girl," the raider, the plunderer, you will never hear acknowledgment of the fact that voguing grew out of Black and Puerto Rican gay ball communities.

Her "Vogue" song, a commercial hit, was an insult to these communities because the litany of names she calls in the song as representative of style and attitude deliberately excludes Blacks and Puerto Ricans. Obviously Madonna must believe that Blacks and Puerto Ricans have contributed nothing to the theater of style and attitude originating in this country, since names like Josephine Baker, Dorothy Dandridge, and Celia Cruz are conspicuously absent from her list of the beautiful ones.

Black gay British filmmaker, Isaac Julien, raised an important issue regarding Black art and culture when I interviewed him shortly after the release of his (1989) Black gay film, *Looking for Langston*. He said, "I'm more interested in questions concerning the commodification of Black art and culture. I think questions such as commodification provide a more realistic analysis and critique of Black art as we approach the end of the twentieth century." Not only are the

questions of commodification more critical than we may yet realize, but urgent questions about American and Western cultural appropriations of those it despises, marginalizes, and disempowers also emerge from the interrogation Julien suggests.

What I find commendable about Livingston's *Paris Is Burning* is that she allows the voices of this highly transgressive ball community to emerge without her interference, without excessive questioning. The "children" enter the frame talking about their lives, the significance of the balls, their families, their precious dreams. We are not exposed to any of Livingston's judgments, if she has any, of the subjects. The authentic voice of this community emerges unfettered.

What was obviously at risk for Livingston, as a white, lesbian filmmaker, is that she could have been rejected as an outsider by the community she was documenting, or she could have mistakenly imposed her personal cultural presumptions and interpretations upon the material. But fortunately, we are spared such a travesty. What we are left with, however, is a lack of historical contextualization for the phenomena of the balls, but even this lack of context is diminished by the brutal honesty of the subjects.

"SWEET DREAMS ARE MADE OF THIS"

Entering the world of the balls is to enter a world where the harsh, soul-breaking realities of oppression are mitigated by the nurturing of dreams and fantasies of splendor. Many are there for the fame and glory a successful walk can bring. Surely, the walk itself and the projected illusion of grandness are far more appealing than the prospect of seeing no acknowledgment of your beauty or your worth anywhere around you. The day-to-day realities of oppression have driven others to less creative survival options than dressing up and pretending to be someone other than who they are.